DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 144 200 EA 009 899

AUTHOR Van Pool, Gerald M.
TITLE Improving Your Student Council.
INSTITUTION National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Va.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 28p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Associations Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091 ($2.00)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Cocurricular Activities; *Guidelines; *Organizational Effectiveness; Secondary Education; *Student Government; Student Organizations; *Student Participation; *Student School Relationship

ABSTRACT

This booklet examines the role of the student council in secondary schools and discusses a variety of strategies for making the student council a valuable part of students' education and a useful component of the school community. Short sections focus in turn on the objectives of student councils, criteria for evaluating student council performance, common maladies plaguing student councils, suggestions for improving student council effectiveness, strategies for publicizing student councils, and teachers' responsibilities to student councils. (JG)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED144200

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Improving Your Student Council

Gerald M. Van Pool

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

NASSP

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Office of Student Activities
National Association of Secondary School Principals

EA 009 899

ISBN 088210-081-5

Copyright 1977
National Association of Secondary School Principals
Office of Student Activities
1904 Association Drive
Reston, Va. 22091

1. Why a Student Council?

MOST MODERN SECONDARY schools now have some form of student council, a phenomenon not readily understood by foreign educators who visit our schools. It is also something of a surprise to the thousands of foreign students who come to this country for a year, live with an American family, and attend an American high school. Very few schools in other parts of the world have anything like a student council, and so these visitors want to know what a council is, what it does, and why so many high schools have such an organization.

In addition, there are undoubtedly many people in the United States (and this includes students) who have neither a clear conception of what a student council is nor an understanding of what it is trying to do.

There are many stated aims, objectives, and purposes, but the following are probably cited most often:

1. *To encourage good citizenship.* The primary objective of a student council is the encouragement and development of good citizenship. Through its many activities the student council enables students to do now, while in school, many of the things that the good citizen is regularly called upon to do: sharing the responsibilities of citizenship, evaluating candidates, running for office, taking part in campaigns, voting, serving on committees, discussing issues, developing an awareness of conditions, and abiding by the decisions of the majority.

2. *To promote harmonious relationships.* The student council ought to be a unifying force in the school and in the community; it is the only school organization that touches the lives of everyone in the school, including students, faculty, and administration. Thus, it is in an advantageous position to hear all sides, weigh evidence, consider opinions, and then try to make helpful suggestions.

3. *To coordinate school activities.* Most schools now have an extensive activities program, one that may become somewhat unwieldy. Schedules must be made and approved; all groups must have their fair share of time and facilities. Many student councils keep a calendar, assign rooms, determine what groups get how much of the available revenue, issue and revoke charters, and in many other ways help to maintain order.

4. *To instill proper attitudes.* The student council often helps students to think about such matters as conduct, morals, honesty and cheating, and school spirit and encourages them to make right decisions. The council helps students to be the kind of young people the nation needs and can respect.

5. *To provide a forum for student expression.* Every student ought to have the right to express an opinion and give his ideas on almost any matter of legitimate school interest. The logical place for him to have his say is in a student council meeting. Here is an organization set up to help students learn the ways of democracy by participating in democratic school management.

What values can reasonably be expected to result from significant student council activity? What actually happens because a school has a student council?

The following are most likely to be affected by council activity:

1. *The individual.* The student who takes an active part in the student council gets the feeling of belonging, that the school is his school, and that the people there are interested in him and what he has to say. His views are welcomed and some of his ideas may even become part of school policy. He learns how to present his ideas before an audience and thus gains confidence. He learns how to work with others in friendly cooperation; he learns how to accept responsibility and to bring a project to successful completion.

2. *The school.* Many high school principals have said that they could not administer their schools as well as they do without the help and cooperation of their student councils. A school gains by having in it a group of students devoted to good citizenship, cooperation, improved conduct, responsible citizenship, and the orderly management of student affairs. A school is generally a happier place if it has a well-organized, efficiently functioning student council; one that is busy with significant projects; fulfilling its obligations to school and to students.

3. *The community.* Parents are often worried about where their children are and what they are doing. Student councils often set up programs of constructive activities and then attempt to guide young people into participating in these programs. Given sound advice and with proper supervision, student councils have often promoted many types of youth programs, meriting the praise and commendation of adults in the community. Has anyone ever heard of police raiding a student council meeting or student council members in court for carrying out the approved activities of the council? It has happened in the case of certain youth groups, such as the high school secret society.

When the observer becomes aware of the accomplishments of student councils in high schools and the good that they have done for individuals, schools, and communities he should not be surprised that most secondary schools have some form of student council; that the student council is the most important student organization in the entire school; and that the office of student council president is generally the most prestigious office that a student can hold. One wishes that some of our visitors from other countries might be sufficiently impressed to carry home the idea of student participation in secondary school administration.

2. Is This a Way to Run a Council?

MANY STUDENT COUNCILS have expressed a need for a set of standards that they can use to assess their organization, activities, performance, and general effectiveness. Council members and officers complain that their council does little or nothing, that it has no prestige, or that the students do not respect it, will not run for office, or even vote in council elections. In one way or another, they all ask the same basic question: What can we do to make our council a good council?

The following criteria may be useful to any council that wishes to evaluate its own performance. We recommend that an interested student council discuss the list in one of its meetings, or perhaps in a series of meetings, and place a *yes* or *no* in front of each item.

CRITERION I

A good student council has clearly defined powers and responsibilities which it understands.

1. It has the power to speak for the student body, to discuss the school's program, and to propose action for the betterment of the school.
2. It has definite jurisdiction over certain well-defined areas of student activity, determined by school policy.
3. It has a maximum of control over its funds, although such control is guided by school policy and is subject to the principal's veto. All funds are strictly accounted for.
4. Its source of power lies in the delegation to it by the principal of responsibility in certain activities; however, the principal reserves the right to veto any action that he considers detrimental to the school, after having explained his position to the school.
5. The council's powers and the principal's veto rights are clearly set forth in the council constitution, copies of which are readily available to the entire student body and faculty.
6. The council's purposes, powers, and responsibilities are understood by the council.

CRITERION II

A good student council practices accepted democratic principles in its operations; its constitution and bylaws are carefully planned and democratically conceived.

1. Race, religion, social status, or academic standing do not bar a student from participation in council activities.

2. Membership on the council and participation in council activities are open to any bona fide student in the school.
3. Student units that elect representatives are small enough to keep close contact with the activities of their representatives.
4. The council is large enough to represent all students and yet small enough to transact business.
5. Election of officers is held in the spring and election of members is held in the fall.
6. Elections are carried on in a dignified manner, by secret ballot, and all ballots are accounted for.
7. Campaigns are in good taste and under the direction of the council.
8. An attempt is made to conduct elections on the basis of merit rather than popularity.
9. All council activities are specifically authorized by the council.
10. All activities are well-planned — as far in advance as possible — and practicable.
11. Those to whom duties are assigned are held responsible for the progress of those activities.
12. Provision is made for the removal of council members who are grossly inefficient or unfaithful to their duties.
13. The council accepts responsibility for its failures as well as for its successes.
14. The homeroom representative expresses his constituents' points of view as well as his own; he reports council action to his room clearly and fairly.

CRITERION III

The faculty and principal are sympathetic to the student council and have a true understanding of its role.

1. The faculty and principal recognize that the council can contribute to the school program.
2. The faculty is kept informed constantly about the role of the council.
3. The faculty and principal demonstrate their faith in the council by calling upon it for assistance.
4. There is a planned program throughout the year to acquaint the student body with the council's purposes, functions, problems, and activities.
5. The homeroom teacher cooperates by helping the representative practice the duties expected of him and by informing the homeroom of its relationship to their representative.
6. Teachers give thoughtful, sympathetic consideration to problems proposed by the students.

CRITERION IV

A good student council has a sound, functioning organization.

1. The council operates by the authority and according to the principles of a written constitution, formally ratified and adopted by the student body.
2. It has well-planned meetings, in a satisfactory meeting place, with proper equipment, and all necessary supplies.
3. It has a trained, experienced adviser who has sufficient time to direct council activities.
4. A definite leadership training workshop is set up for council officers and is made available to officers of other school groups as well.
5. The council has the opportunity to experiment occasionally, to be on its own, and to fail as well as to succeed.
6. It has its own professional library available to all council members.
7. It belongs to all appropriate state and national organizations.
8. It keeps good records and issues an annual report.
9. Delegates are sent to local, regional, state, and national student council meetings at council or school expense.
10. It evaluates its activities regularly.

CRITERION V

An effective student council has prestige, serves the school willingly, and enlists the ready cooperation of the student body.

1. The student body understands the purpose of the student council and considers the council its agent of expression in the school.
2. Students understand and fully recognize both the extent and the limitations of the council's power; they know what it is and what it is not; what it can do and what it cannot do.
3. The average student feels that he is represented.
4. Students willingly submit plans or suggestions to the council.
5. Council members are willing to learn the skills necessary to carry on their work successfully.
6. Student council projects are worthwhile and challenging.
7. Representatives make every effort to attend every council meeting, and their attendance is carefully recorded.
8. The council's program involves the maximum number of students, including non-council members.
9. The student council promotes leadership and self-control among the student body; it is interested in student conduct but does not use any form of punishment, such as a student court.
10. Projects are carried out by committees; there are enough committees so that every council member can serve on at least one.
11. Committees are carefully supervised and are expected to function.
12. The council charters other student groups in the school and maintains good rapport with them.
13. The council understands that its activities provide a learning situation

for all who participate; thus, any student in school may take part in its program. The process is more important than the project.

At this point, student councils should be warned that no set of standards will exactly fit every situation or the needs of every student council in the country. People change, circumstances differ, and what works in one school may not necessarily work in another. Therefore, those who are evaluating a student council need more than just a general set of criteria.

The evaluators should, for example, possess a great store of information about the community, the school, and the background and history of the council. There are many methods for securing this kind of information: the written questionnaire; personal interviews with administration officials, faculty, and students; discussion groups; a suggestion box; special assemblies; bulletin board notices; school newspaper articles; and public address announcements. In other words, the student council should make every effort to encourage everyone in the school to speak his mind, to criticize, and to make suggestions.

And yet, after all of this, the evaluator must recognize that his recommendations concerning desirable changes will, in most cases, be only educated guesses.

In summary, then, the process of detecting the best way to change or to progress is complex indeed. But a good way to start is with a checklist which permits a council to match its performance against a set of commonly accepted standards. If, after going over this list carefully, a council finds that it has been able to answer "yes" to most of the items, things would appear to be in pretty good shape.

If this particular council were asked: Is this any way to run a council? they might reply in the affirmative. However, if there are too many negative answers some kind of drastic action is indicated. It will take all of the imagination, resourcefulness, and ingenuity of the council to determine what to do.

3. R_x for Sick Councils

WHEN STUDENT COUNCIL members have an opportunity at workshops and conventions to question consultants, someone always says, "Our student council doesn't amount to anything. We don't do very much, and the students don't have any respect for us. What can we do?"

The trouble, however, is that it is well-nigh impossible to diagnose at long range. It is somewhat akin to calling the doctor and saying, "Doctor, I'm sick. What's wrong with me and how can I be cured?" Any doctor would have to have more than such sketchy information before he would hazard a diagnosis. Thus, anyone being asked what is wrong with a student council would have to have a great deal of significant information. How are members elected? What kind of restrictions do you impose on candidates for council membership? Are the faculty members behind you? If not, why not? What are your aims? How about publicity?

Anyone attempting to "cure a sick council" would have to ask these and other more searching questions before suggesting a "cure." Any advice will have to be somewhat general. A specific diagnosis will have to await a personal, complete, on-the-spot examination.

What Are You Trying to Do?

Perhaps your student council is not effective because you, the council members, do not know what you want or what you are trying to do. Perhaps you have never submitted the question of objectives to the student body, asking for their ideas on what you ought to be doing. It is ridiculous to suppose that your student council can be effective unless you know in what direction you want to go. Any tourist should know well in advance where he is going, what route he plans to take, where he will stay, and approximately when he expects to arrive. It is just as important for the student council to plan its work in view of what it wants to do and what it hopes to accomplish.

Aims and objectives don't just happen but must be thought out carefully. Meetings should be held with the student body in general assemblies and in homerooms. Conferences should be held with the faculty and administration so that the council is well aware of what the rest of the school wants and expects from the council. The aims of thousands of high school student councils throughout the country will vary just about as much as the different schools vary. Each school must determine for itself what it wants the council to do, but there are some *basic* objectives for every student council, no matter where it is located.

The student council ought to know, at the very start, the areas in which

it may and may not operate. Much trouble and misunderstanding can be avoided if the student council knows, at the very beginning, that there are three areas of authority in the school:

1. The area in which the student council may operate almost independently.
2. The area in which it works in conjunction and cooperation with the faculty and administration.
3. The area which is the sole province of the faculty and administration.

Finally, the student council ought to know that it is a student organization in which cooperation is much more important than competition. In almost any school activity the spirit of competition seems to keep it going; students are always trying to "beat" some other student or group of students. Not so in the student council. Here is an organization that cooperates with every person and every organization in the school; it competes with no one and helps everyone.

If councils will stop trying to compete with other organizations and work in an atmosphere of cooperation, the chances are good that few misunderstandings will develop and mutual trust and accord will result. But students have to know beforehand, in advance, what the council is and what it is trying to do before such a situation can be realized. It all goes back to the original statement: a student council has to have a definite, clear-cut objective if it expects to amount to anything in the school.

How Is Your Council Organized?

Much of the trouble that student councils encounter is due to the type of organization they have. In some schools, the council is very informal — probably a student committee that meets "whenever there is any business." Or it may be simply a group of students that the principal calls upon for help and advice if he feels that they will have something to offer. In some extreme cases, it might be students actually appointed by the principal — a process in which the student body has had nothing whatever to say. On the other hand, the council may be top-heavy with organization. Some councils have a constitution that runs to seven or eight mimeographed pages and that provides for such items as supreme court, president's cabinet, two-house legislature, district attorneys, sheriffs, "traffic tickets," and the like. Somewhere between these two extremes the happy medium can be found.

The best kind of student organization is that type which actually works best. No school should attempt to copy exactly the form used in some other school. What works in one school will not necessarily work in another. If your student council does not work, it may be that you ought to change your organization.

Every student council should be the result of cooperative enterprise on the part of the whole school. For example, a student council is not going to work if the principal announces in the assembly on Friday, "I believe that

we ought to have a student council in this school and I have drawn up the plan of operation. Next Monday we will put that plan into effect." It is not the purpose of this article to tell any school how to organize a council but simply to state that a council is almost invariably doomed to failure unless the whole school has some part in deciding that there should be a council and in helping to plan its method of operation.

Every student in the school must be represented and must feel his representation. There are some schools in which freshmen, for example, are not allowed to take part in elections or are reduced to the status of third class citizens. Some students have said that, because there are so many freshmen, each one should be allowed only one-half a vote! "Why, they could out-vote us seniors on anything we proposed." In other schools, only upperclassmen can hold office. In still others, only those students who have paid their "poll tax" or bought an activity ticket, etc., are allowed to take part in student council activities. In other words, instead of trying to get as many students into student council activities as is possible, these schools have spent their time and energy in trying to find means by which some students could be kept out of things and discouraged from taking part.

Another fault of some student council organizations that helps to bring on trouble and discontent is the fact that membership requirements are too high. Many of us are guilty of stating, "We work with only the finest students in school. We get the cream of the student body." This may or may not be true, but this kind of thinking is one of the causes of trouble and one of the reasons some student councils do not have much effect on the life of the school.

As I have pointed out many times, the main business of the student council is the teaching and the practice of good citizenship. And this means good citizenship for everyone in the school — not just for the best students. Not just for the "cream." It means that the student council is an organization of and for everyone and that everyone ought to have some share in its operations. How can we justify requiring a *B* average, or an outstanding citizenship record, or a nearly-perfect attendance record, or the recommendation of the faculty, or other restrictions, if we honestly believe that the student council should teach citizenship and that citizenship is for all?

The reason many student councils fail to make an impression on the student body is that the students believe that the student council is a "closed corporation," a special clique, not for them but for only the select few, having little or no meaning for the ordinary student. If your student council does not have the proper influence on the student body, perhaps your membership requirements are too high.

Do You Have a "Secret Police Force" in Your School?

At a recent national conference a boy in one of the discussion groups said, "In our school, the student council is the secret police. We wear our

badges pinned to the underside of our coat lapels and we report students to headquarters. No one knows who we are and when we may be making reports." The delegates were scandalized, as they had every right to be. Unfortunately, however, the same thing is happening to a somewhat lesser degree in thousands of high schools where student councils feel that their main mission in life is to punish student offenders. One sponsor noted that the student court and the student council are synonymous — there is no difference between the two!

If your student council is ailing it may be due to the fact that you are spending your time and energy trying to apprehend and punish student offenders. It may be that you have, in effect, a "secret police force" that expends its energies in crime detection.

This kind of conduct and this type of activity have no place in a student council program. The student council is a positive, constructive organization and has no business wasting its time and energy in devising punishments for those who fall into their hands. And, anyway, how can you expect to secure the affection, respect, and cooperation you want from your fellow students if, on the one hand, you urge them to cooperate with you and on the other you slap them down if they don't? You cannot legislate good citizenship! You cannot order a state of mind!

What Kind of Activities Do You Promote?

It is a foregone conclusion that if a student council is to command the respect of the student body and have the prestige to which it is entitled, then it will have to do something important! A student council must determine what it wants to do, but what it wants to do must have some significance. However, what is truly important in one school may be of secondary importance in another. It is not possible to suggest activities that will hold the same interest and be of the same importance in every school.

Selecting the project that will appeal to most, if not all, of the student body requires considerable imagination and ingenuity. The students must feel that attaining the goal is important enough to justify the amount of time, work, and money expended in its behalf. They must feel that enough good will come from it so that their efforts will not have been wasted. The project must be difficult enough to challenge their energies; interesting enough to keep them busy; and far-reaching enough to bring in many non-council members to work in its behalf. The whole school should have an opportunity to help decide on the final project through homeroom discussions, printed questionnaires, personal conferences, and requests in the school paper. It will be difficult for any project to succeed unless it does have the approval and enthusiastic support of the general student body.

Plans must be made well in advance. Seldom will any project succeed if it is thought up in a hurry and rushed through with little or no planning or publicity. The wise student council will, at the start of the year or in the

summer, hold meetings to decide on projects for the coming year, on other school activities to assist, and, in general, on priorities for their time and efforts. Budgeting of activities is essential!

Council members should visit councils in nearby schools to see what kind of projects they sponsor and how they have organized them. They should attend student council conferences, conventions, and workshops to see what others do and get first-hand information on how the projects worked. However, as has been said before, the council must not assume that because a project is good for a neighboring school it will be good for them. Nor must any council assume that the method of procedure in one school is the method to use in their school.

Finally, if any activity is to be a success it must have proper publicity. Far too many schools do not use the most common forms of publicity to benefit their activities. I refer especially to printed announcements sent to homerooms; notices over the public address system; announcements and skits in assemblies; posters in the hall; news in the school paper; a special ad or a column in the local newspaper; radio announcements; and flyers for students to take home. If a project is to be a success people have to know about it.

Does your student council meet in the gym, auditorium, next to the boilers, or out in the hall? Some do! Some councils meet "wherever there is a vacant room."

Do you have a regular time — on school time — for your council to meet? You should! Some councils meet "whenever there is any business," "when the principal wants us to do something," "if our school work is done," "during the lunch hour." Your student council ought to meet on school time, and in a regular place in the school! How much importance will your school attach to the council if it meets when, as, and where it can?

It is difficult to believe that the student council has any real important place in the life of the school if it has to meet under any but the most favorable circumstances. If your council has suffered loss of prestige and if it is regarded as little above the lowliest organization in school, perhaps it is because you have made no effort to dignify it by regularity in time and place of meeting. Perhaps you cannot have a room all to yourself but at least you should be able to use the *same* room — the room in which all of your records and supplies are kept.

How do you get supplies for your work? If the council is important enough to be included in the school program, then it is important enough to be assured of the supplies necessary to do its work. I refer to typewriters, paper, pencils and ink, duplicating equipment, files, and such materials necessary in any well-run office. The council should be given these materials willingly and gladly by the school. The council should not have to pay for them or beg for them.

Any successfully functioning organization will discover before too long that there are numerous devices that enable it to do good work and to

remain a successful organization. The student council has its share, too. A few of them are mentioned here:

- Bring students who are not council members into the work of the council by assigning them places on student council committees.
- Keep committees alive and working. Do not permit a committee to remain inactive. Either give it some work to do and check to see that the work is done or disband it.
- Encourage visitors to come to student council meetings. This is one of the best forms of publicity, but is often sadly neglected by councils. Some, in fact, seem to prefer to give an air of secrecy to the meetings and seem to resent visitors.
- Members must feel that the council is important and must be enthusiastic about the organization. Enthusiasm is contagious.
- Secure the interest of the faculty. Little can be accomplished unless you have the faculty on your side.
- Plan your meetings. Know in advance what you are going to do. Avoid an informal, haphazard meeting, especially if you have visitors.

How Well Did You Do This Year?

Every well-organized and well-directed student council should make a serious evaluation of its work at least once a year. This is in addition, of course, to the regular day-by-day evaluation that goes on all the time. In the annual evaluation, you should make a sincere effort to see how many of the stated objectives were attained or how nearly they were approached. There are numerous means for doing this.

All the students and all the faculty should be asked to participate. The evaluation can be quite subjective; consisting, for example, of informal talks in homerooms. At the same time, suggestions should be made for the next year. Better, however, is a rating chart on which all in the school rate the council on any number of items. This focuses attention on areas in which council needs guidance and perhaps calls to the school's attention numerous activities that may have been forgotten. A combination of a rating form or evaluation sheet coupled with a sincere, subjective discussion will probably give the council enough ideas so that past mistakes can be avoided and corrected in the future.

You have an ailing council and you have called in the doctor. You have said that your council needs some professional help, quick, and you are willing to try anything to get the council on its feet again. The prescription included in this article is not a cure-all. It may not do a thing for your own council because what has been suggested as the sickness may not be the sickness your council has at all!

The prescription covered in this article is, as was stated at the very beginning, quite general. Take your medicine. It can't do any harm and it might do some good!

4. Improving the Student Council

THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 31,500 junior and senior high school student councils in the United States. It would be gratifying to assume that all of these councils were well-organized, efficient, and hard at work on all kinds of worthwhile projects. Common sense, however, tells us that many are councils in name only; that some fritter away their time on busy work; and that others contribute little or nothing to the life of the school.

There is no one all-inclusive answer to the problems that beset many student councils. There is no sure cure or panacea guaranteed to turn every stumbling, bumbling council into a model of efficiency. The Age of Miracles has not yet extended this far! However, there are a few suggestions that can help any council to increase its usefulness and make it a more effective organization than it is.

Here are a few:

1. The student council should seek constantly to secure student opinions and reactions on all phases of the school program in which the student council plays any part. It has a duty to secure these opinions as often and in as many ways as possible. Likewise, it has a very real responsibility to report back to the student body everything that transpires in student council meetings. These reports should be given verbally to the representative group or over the public address system, through printed summaries, articles in school and community newspapers, announcements in assemblies, notices on the bulletin boards, and in any other manner that will help let the student body know what is going on.

2. The council should make no attempt to punish students. This, of course, rules out any form of the student court. The council should try to raise the standards of student behavior and encourage students to conduct themselves in a mature manner but ought not to punish those who do not conform.

3. The council must understand that the entire philosophy of the student council is participation and that the council does not run the school. There have been some unfortunate occurrences in the past due to the fact that the students were never told the areas in which they might operate. Thus, some councils had the impression that they were really in charge of the school. There are probably some schools that are still smarting from the effects of this failure to educate the students prior to the establishment of the student council.

4. Even though the student council is an organization primarily for students, the members should make every attempt to see the

administration and faculty side of any situation. Time and trouble can be saved and hard feelings avoided if the council attempts to view each activity through the eyes of administration and the faculty before actually beginning work.

5. The successful council is the busy council, utilizing the imagination, ingenuity, and resourcefulness of all the students in planning and carrying out projects. It should never be necessary for a council to say, "We don't have anything to do." Any council that sits back and waits for ideas to be brought to it is headed for trouble. Students in the modern high school are bubbling over with ideas and it is a backward council indeed that does not take advantage of this happy situation.

6. The council must represent and be composed of all groups within the school. It must represent all levels of intellectual attainment, all grade levels, and as many interests and activities as possible. In short, it must promote something during the year which will appeal to everyone. All too often the ailing council is one that is composed of a small clique of students, possibly those with extremely high grade point averages. One sure way to "kill" a council is to have it represent only a small segment of the school population.

7. In planning projects for the improvement of the entire school, the council should sponsor as many outstanding, worthwhile projects as possible and not waste its time on items that do not matter. Obviously every council project is not going to be of earth-shaking importance, but all of the projects ought to be projects that count.

8. There is a great wealth of literature available on the subject of the student council that members should read. Council members ought to be just as professional as doctors and lawyers — professional people who keep themselves well informed on what is happening in their fields. Members must know what is going on around them and adapt their own programs according to what they have learned.

9. Insofar as it is possible, councils should make every effort to see what other councils are doing. Much of the trouble with "sick" councils is due to "insulation"; that is, many councils haven't the slightest idea of what others are doing. This lack of awareness results in something akin to inbreeding. There are many ways in which a council can learn what others are doing, including: visiting the council in a nearby school; attending a district, state, or national student council convention; participating in a student council workshop; corresponding with other councils; and reading all available literature.

10. The council should involve as many non-council members as possible. It is not necessary that each member of every committee be a student council member. Involve as many students as possible; get everyone into the act. The committee chairman might well be a council member, but other members should be those who are interested in

the work of this particular committee, who have something to contribute, and who are willing to work.

11. The successful student council knows exactly what it is trying to do, has definite aims and objectives, and everything that it does throughout the year points toward those aims. The successful student council evaluates its activities, including successes and failures, and changes its course or alters its plans when necessary.

5. It Pays to Advertise the Student Council

A QUESTION FREQUENTLY asked by student council members is: How can we get the support and cooperation of a somewhat indifferent student body, faculty, or community? In answer, two questions need to be considered: What is your student council doing? and, Does anyone know that you are doing it?

The successful student council is generally the busy student council, but it has to be busy at something important and people need to know this. A student council may be extremely busy in all sorts of activities but little is accomplished if no one else knows it. If advertising is good for business and industry, why isn't it also good for student councils? A company cannot hope to sell cars, cosmetics, or codfish unless the buying public knows that such products are available and can be purchased. Likewise, a student council which has literally hundreds of services to offer can hardly expect to get the support and cooperation of others in the school and community unless everyone knows that there is an active student council and that it is doing someone some good.

There are numerous reasons why a student council should adopt a public relations program to advertise its services. A council is much more likely to get help and cooperation if people know what its objectives are, why it has been organized, what some of its past accomplishments are, and what its plans for the future include. It has been said, "A man isn't what he says he is unless he's working at it." Likewise, a council isn't a council unless it is busy doing those things which a council ought to do. Nothing succeeds like success, it is true, and if a council has had a happy and profitable existence there should be little difficulty getting help and cooperation *if people know what the council is doing*.

A student council which publicizes its activities may also find that if people are really informed, they may have ideas and suggestions of their own to offer — ideas that may well result in an improved program and more significant activities.

Some councils seem to feel that their programs are somewhat secret, to be conducted only by student council members. They may often wonder why their councils are not particularly well thought of in their schools and why the faculty and student body do not rally to their support when they need it. The answer should be obvious: if the program is conducted by and restricted to council members and if as a result no one else knows very much about what's happening, the council has no reason to complain.

An excellent reason for a good publicity program is to help others. The student council does not compete — it cooperates. Therefore, it is quite possible that if a council gives adequate publicity to its program other councils may read or hear about the activities and borrow some ideas for their own programs. Any council ought to be happy to know that others have found something of value in its program of activities and that others have thought enough of what is being done to emulate it.

It is difficult to understand how a council can get the help and support it needs if no one else has any idea of the aims and objectives of the council. A council should tell people what it has to offer and ask freely and frankly for help, assistance, and cooperation. In other words, *advertise*.

Assuming that councils want to find means to tell people what they are doing and what their plans are, the logical question is: How do they do it? A council can use many devices and techniques to keep the school and public informed.

Here are a few:

1. *The student council bulletin*. At regular intervals many schools issue an attractive bulletin describing all the recent activities of the council, announcements of coming events, pleas for assistance, minutes of the last student council meeting, and other similar items of interest. This is distributed to all homerooms, to all clubs and organizations, and even to members of the school board. Copies can be posted on all bulletin boards and read aloud in each homeroom. It is understood, of course, that each bulletin will be clear, concise, and interesting.

2. *Oral reports*. Shortly after each student council meeting, each representative can make an oral report to his homeroom or constituent group. He might read from the bulletin mentioned above or he can make his own report adapted from notes he took at the meeting. He should be prepared to answer questions about what has been done or what is planned for the future.

3. *A column in the school paper*. A student council often has regular space in the school paper devoted to its program. The council president might also have a regular message to impart to the school and community. There are few better places to do this than in the school paper.

4. *A column or section in the local newspaper*. Most newspapers are eager to print interesting news about what the students in the local schools are doing. Some papers give one weekly column to school news; others give as much as a half page to school news.

5. *School assemblies*. A representative of the student council often speaks regularly in the school assembly. This is especially important when the council has embarked upon some significant program. It is almost a necessity during the football and basketball seasons when feelings run high. Some schools permit the student council to arrange all assemblies. In other schools the student council is asked to put on an assembly at special times — for example, when new students are attending for the first time.

Some student councils arrange for a demonstration student council meeting. Many hold their annual installation services in a special school assembly.

6. Local radio and TV stations. Most stations are willing to present some kind of school program at various times during the year. The programs have to be interesting, of course. A truly active student council with a significant program should have no difficulty in arranging one or two such programs each year — programs that are interesting enough and significant enough to capture the eyes and ears of the public.

7. Public address system. The public address system is a wonderful invention and should be used — but not abused. Announcements of importance and interest to the student body should be made over the system whenever necessary, but there are many warnings that should be heeded concerning the proper use of the PA. The speaker should be someone with an interesting voice; he should speak clearly and distinctly; and he must be brief. A droning, monotonous voice defeats the purpose of the PA system and these announcements are worse than none at all.

8. The student handbook. Every school should distribute some type of student handbook listing school rules and regulations and a directory of school clubs and organizations. This handbook should be presented to every new student. The student council, the most important student organization in the school, should be described in the handbook with a complete account of what it is and what it is trying to do.

9. Posters. Notices on bulletin boards are useful and serve a worthy purpose. Unfortunately, however, students do not always stop to read the announcements found there. They can hardly miss a poster! Posters should not be kept up after the affairs they advertise are over. General posters should be changed frequently so they do not lose their appeal. Keep posters clean, fresh, and appealing!

10. Exhibits and displays. Whenever possible, arrange to have interesting exhibits and displays set up where students will see them. Many schools have corridor showcases that are well suited to such displays. Others may be set up in the library, on hall tables, in the cafeteria, or in the auditorium. Like posters, displays must be kept up to date.

11. Demonstrations. Set up some type of demonstration in an assembly or some other place where every student will see it. This might be a model student council meeting, a special class in the correct use of parliamentary procedure, an example of how a homeroom discussion on student council proposals ought to be conducted, or a re-creation of a meeting between the student council and the city council. Some of these demonstrations must be serious; others could well be light hearted and humorous.

12. A speakers' bureau. There are many civic groups that might be interested in hearing a representative from a school speak on student council projects and problems. It stands to reason, of course, that any speaker sent to a service club, PTA, or other civic group should be a good

speaker, well informed, and able to meet people. It may be necessary to set up a special speech class to train speakers to make these public appearances. The dividends would be great in proportion to the work and time involved.

13. Publication of pamphlets. The student council might find it helpful to issue at irregular intervals a little newspaper or pamphlet that the students could take home for parents to read. This need not be an elaborate or expensive item; it could very well be mimeographed. Such a publication would be especially valuable when the council is planning a project for which it needs advice and assistance.

There is a great need for news of successful student council projects; in fact, there is a great need for almost any kind of student council news. Other councils, the schools themselves, and the communities want and need to know what the councils are doing. Advertising lets people know what's going on, what a council is planning, and what kind of help or advice is needed. Advertising helps to bring support from the apathetic and cooperation from the uncooperative. It helps to discover hidden talents and makes everyone aware of the number and variety of activities with which the council concerns itself. If a student council complains that it does not receive the help to which it believes it is entitled, the members should look to their publicity program. Perhaps people don't know the council exists!

6. Teacher Responsibility to the Student Council

THE STATE STUDENT council convention had just adjourned, but small groups of student and faculty delegates still lingered in the auditorium comparing notes, jotting down addresses, informally evaluating the two days of activity, and speculating on the future of their individual high school student councils.

"I have so many new ideas that I can hardly wait to try them all out," exclaimed one girl, bubbling over with enthusiasm.

"This is the best meeting I ever attended," responded another. "If we don't have a good student council this year with all the stuff I learned, it won't be my fault."

Many others eagerly told of their experiences, the new tactics they had discovered, different projects for their councils to use, and new and better methods of doing the daily routine tasks of any good student council. The festive and excited air of happy accomplishment was shattered, however, by a boy who had said very little but had listened, rather glumly, to all the others.

Finally he burst out, "I've had a swell time and I've learned a lot of things. But nothing is going to change when I get back. All of us from our school are rarin' to go and make our student council one of the best in the state, but we won't be able to do a thing."

Everyone talked at once. "Why not?" "What's wrong in your school?" "Who's going to stop you?" "Isn't that why you came here? To do a better job back home?"

When he could finally get a word in, the boy tried to answer all the questions at once. "We have a student council in our school but it doesn't amount to much because we can't get any help from the teachers! We students get a lot of swell ideas and try to sell them to the teachers but they don't want to be bothered with our plans. They tell us they have too much to do without trying to help the student council try out all kinds of fancy plans. Why, I heard at this convention about one council that goes from door to door at election time and distributes circulars asking all voters to get out and vote. Do you suppose we could do that in our school? I should guess not!

"We tried to have a big homecoming dance last fall but of course we had to have chaperones, just like at every other school dance. We asked every teacher in our school to chaperone at that dance and out of almost 40 teachers do you know how many agreed to help us out? Three! That's all.

Just three! The principal finally had to assign some teachers to the job and you can imagine how happy they were about that!"

Of course, there were many expressions of shocked surprise that teachers should find it inconvenient to assist the student council, and immediately the whole group began to give suggestions on how to interest the faculty in student council projects. But the convention was over; most of the delegates had to start homeward.

The dejected delegate with his teacher problem finally left, to go back to what must have been an unpleasant and frustrating situation.

Possibly his school was an extreme case. Possibly there were mitigating circumstances which, if described and fully understood, would have explained the apparent reluctance of his faculty to assist with student council work. But, even if such were the case, it would not explain the fact that at almost every student council convention there is one discussion group with some such title as: "How Can the Student Council Reduce Friction Between the Students and the Faculty?"

This must be a rather common problem in high schools. In fact, one prominent student council sponsor wrote to me that one of the services of the National Association of Student Councils should be some kind of a campaign to make the entire faculty as aware and as keenly interested in the student council as the sponsors and council members.

That sponsor maintained — and I agree wholeheartedly — that the student council is the one high school organization that represents everyone in the school: that it is the one organization that coordinates or at least ought to coordinate all high school student activities. Such being the case, she argued, the student council is not just another club in which just a few might be interested.

It is understandable that not too many students or teachers would be interested in the Latin Club, the Math Club, or the Science Club. These and all the other clubs appeal to people who like the things that those clubs do. But the student council is the one organization in the school that reaches everyone in its attempts to teach good citizenship. Therefore, the student council works for all of us and with all of us and deserves our support.

But how can we convince the entire faculty of the average high school that the student council *is* their concern just as much as it is the concern of the one chosen to be the council sponsor?

What help can we give student councils that ask — even beg — for understanding and cooperation from the faculty? What can we do to enable delegates to come home from an inspiring convention, faces aglow with the excitement of wonderful plans for a new student council year, to begin their work with the knowledge that their teachers are with them, supporting them, and giving them their best cooperation? How can we assure even the ordinary student council that has just been elected and that hasn't been anywhere that the faculty of that school believes in them to the extent of

giving practical help and guidance, moral support, and friendly understanding?

There are dozens of things we can do if we *really* want to:

1. Every teacher in the school can make himself familiar with the aims and objectives of the student council, its philosophy, and its purpose for existing. On some occasions I have chided student council members, however gently, because they don't know exactly what they and the council are supposed to do. In too many cases, neither do the teachers.

All should know that the student council does not try to run the school — but that through the student council, the students of the high school have a means of expressing their opinions. The student council is a forum of public opinion, an agency through which students learn to be good citizens by practicing good citizenship. The faculty should know and understand this.

2. The faculty should evidence an interest in the development of good citizens. We have all about us, on every hand, evidences of bad citizenship, so it is logical to suppose that the honest and sincere teacher should be interested in organizations that try to develop good citizens. This interest must not only be felt; it must be demonstrated. Members of the student council need to know immediately that they can come to their teachers with student council problems and that they will not be turned away.

3. Students have the right to feel that they can ask for the cooperation of teachers on any number of projects and that they will receive it. This cooperation may be of many forms: a word of advice; chaperonage of a dance; assistance with posters; assistance in writing a newspaper article; or any of the hundreds of little things a teacher can do to cooperate with the student council.

I know full well the many demands made upon a teacher's time and energies. I also know full well that sometimes the only reward a cooperative teacher gets is another batch of requests for more help. One teacher complained, and with good reason, "I'm too good natured. I do everything the kids ask me to do and what happens? When someone else wants a job done, who is asked to do it? You guessed it, I'm the one. Some of the other teachers think I'm a sucker and maybe I am."

The trouble here, I imagine, is not that this one teacher does too much but that the others on the faculty don't do enough. If every teacher fulfilled his duties as well as the teacher just mentioned, there would be little need for one teacher to carry the full load.

4. Mistakes will be made by students as well as teachers. It is unfair for teachers constantly to point to a student council failure and ask why they should help the council: "The council doesn't do anything right, anyway." I was told of a situation in which the principal disbanded the council because it had not solved the noon-hour recreation program in one semester, a problem the faculty had wrestled with for years. If mistakes are

made, and they will be, it is only right for teachers to point them out, but only as a guide for future action. The council is not to be condemned for an honest mistake.

5. The council should never be disparaged, in public or in private. Nor should council members be embarrassed or humiliated. I know of instances in which a student council member returned to class after a council meeting to be greeted in some such fashion as this, "Well, here's Mr. High and Mighty! So you decided to favor us with your presence again. I don't know if we can stand it to be in the same room with the president of the student council."

Another teacher told a student council member, "You can't be in my class and be on the council. I need every minute of the period, every day, and if you're going to miss class you may as well drop out."

And still another, "We're supposed to have a report today from our student council representative but we haven't time. We need the time for the lesson and can't waste a minute of it on this report."

These are only a few samples of the kind of things some teachers say about the student council. How can we expect the school to respect the council, to cooperate with it, to support its projects, if some teachers are constantly saying deprecatory things about the council and its members? It is quite obvious that teachers of this type are convinced that what is important in school is the *subject*, not the child!

6. Praise where possible and criticize, if necessary at all, in private. Everyone likes to be told that he is doing a good job, and the members of the student council are no exception. If the council members have done good work, tell them so. If they have made mistakes, take them aside and offer sympathetic advice. Be patient and remember that the student council is primarily a teaching device.

If it is not possible to see the results of student council work immediately, there is no reason for being discouraged or angry. Sometimes there will be no readily apparent results, but this does not mean that nothing was accomplished. Like bread cast upon the waters, we don't always know when we have taught and when the student has learned. Therefore, we must be patient and just hope that everyone who comes into contact with the student council has, somehow, been changed by the experience.

7. It is not a sign of weakness to call upon students for help. It is not a sign of failure for a teacher to admit that a certain problem in school has him licked! Maybe a student can solve it. Maybe it's a problem for the council. If so, we should not feel humiliated to call upon students for their help. Even for advice. It is not unreasonable to ask some students to sit in on a faculty meeting in order to get their viewpoint. Students want to feel that they are needed and that the student council is an organization through which the students can render valuable assistance to the school's program.

8. Remember that the school belongs to all. It is not the teachers' school and it is not the students' school. Teachers have a real responsibility toward their students and must feel that the opinion of a student is at times as valuable as that of any member of the faculty. No longer is it "smart," if ever it was, for a teacher or principal to say, with what is supposed to be indignant self-righteousness, "No kid is going to tell me how to run my school!"

Well, no student wants to run a school. All he wants is to be treated as a human being with ideas, suggestions, plans, projects, and maybe a few complaints. He has the right to be heard by the faculty; he has a right to expect sympathetic cooperation, understanding, and friendly assistance. Teachers can do a great deal toward making the student council work and toward establishing a pleasanter and more congenial school community if they will remember, and practice, the following:

1. Know exactly and specifically what the student council really is.
2. Demonstrate a healthy interest in what the council is doing.
3. Cooperate with the council when asked, and even if not asked.
4. Understand that not all council projects will be successful.
5. Be sympathetic and understanding — never cynical, sarcastic, or disparaging.
6. Praise council members when possible; criticize in private.
7. Seek student help if necessary; make the council work by giving it some work to do.
8. Remember that the school is a cooperative enterprise.

It may be Utopian to expect all of these things to come to pass. But if any fair share of the preceding suggestions are carried out by any appreciable number of faculty members, I can foresee a glorious future for the student council and its lofty ideals of better citizenship through better leadership!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — Gerald M. Van Pool is director emeritus of the NASSP Office of Student Activities. He was NASSP's first director of student activities, serving from 1947 until his retirement in 1970.

More About Student Councils

The publications listed below are available from the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Va. 22091. Prices and ordering information are available on request.

- Communication and Leadership
- Domestic Student Exchange Programs. A New Adventure
- The Effective Student Council in the Mid-Seventies
- A Guide to Student Council Projects
- How to Run an Efficient and Effective Student Activities Program
- Of Love and Magic: The Junior High/Middle School Student Council Adviser
- Models for Student Participation
- Parliamentary Procedure Without Stress
- Profiles of Student Council Officers
- The Student Advocate
- Student Council Handbook
- Student Council Leadership File
- Student Structures: Moving Toward Student Government
- Winning Combinations for Junior High/Middle School Student Councils
- Workshops: Laboratories for Student Leaders